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Re-Imagining Linguistic Competence and Teaching towards Communicative Success in Transnational and Translingual Spaces of Today's Global Reality

Maria Houston

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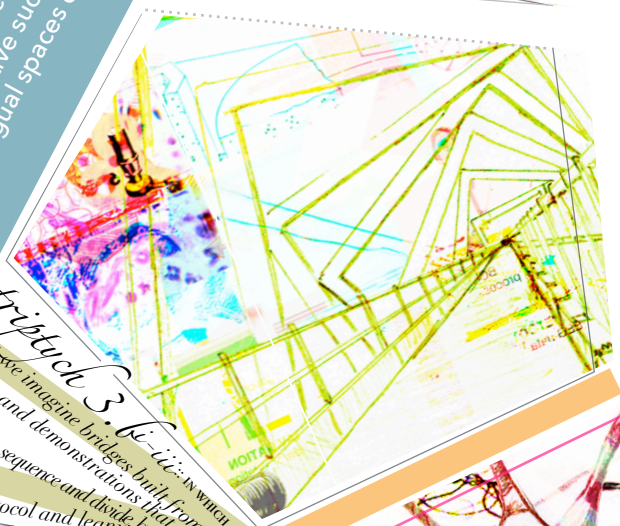
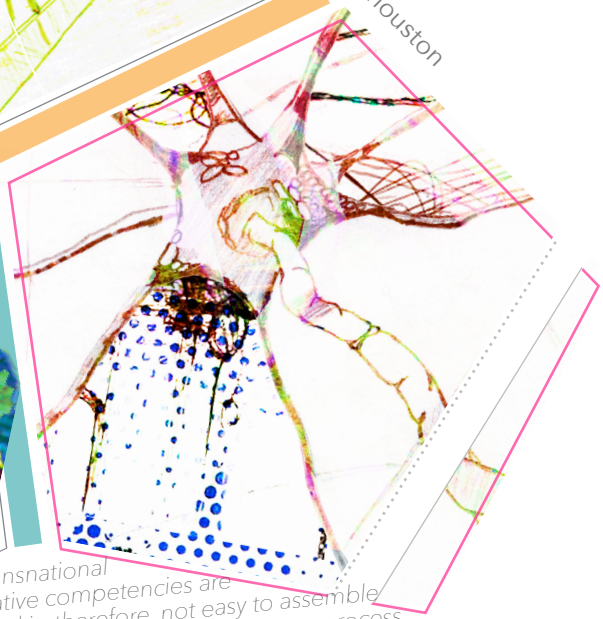
triptych 3.0

I've imagine bridges built from . . .
lines and demonstrations that span
& collapse, sequence and divide gain &
synthesize a protocol and learning





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A Job Interview Scenario

"Ok. See this text right here?" He asked, pointing at an email on the computer screen."

"Yes," I responded.

"Translate it. Don't be nervous. Do the best you can. I know how stuff works. So, if you just point me in the right direction, I will get the technicalities."

"Ok," I replied.

I looked at the first sentence. All I was able to understand was that someone failed to order proper types of something, and the warehouse had 50 pieces of this stuff now. I knew I had to explain what that stuff was. In Russian it said "поплавок": the bobber on the fishing rod. It didn't make sense because I was interviewing for a job of an interpreter at an aluminum factory. On top of this, I did not know the English equivalent for "поплавок." I had to explain a fishing bobber as an oval or round plastic object that helps to see when fish bites. I used body language to aid myself.

As soon as my future boss heard the explanation, he knew that the text was referring to a float used for metal level control in furnaces. He said he understood the email perfectly and that I did an excellent job. Since the day of that interview, I have worked in various functions in corporate settings, from an interpreter to a training and development specialist at a large international company, moved to the U.S., received a doctorate, and am currently teaching freshmen composition at a four-year college. My corporate background in Training and Development, and graduate degrees in TESOL, Composition, and Adult Education inform my interdisciplinary and pragmatic lens at communication instruction at a college level. This article is my contribution to push the academy towards practice-based curricula, with outcomes relevant to the diverse, virtual, multimodal, and multilingual professional global

landscape we live in today.

Transnational Communicative Competences (TCC)

In the highly competitive global society of today, transnational and translingual encounters are frequent at workplaces (Ardichvili). According to a 2013 report by the British Council, more than two-thirds of international employers related that their associates have frequent encounters with transnational colleagues. In addition, over half of the respondents conveyed that their employees frequently meet with partners and clients oversees (British Council). As a result, employers expect their associates to have the competence to navigate multiple cultures and linguistic domains successfully. Such competence is often referred to as "intercultural" or "communicative" (British Council). Since the term "intercultural competence" does not encompass the complex linguistic and rhetorical dimensions of transnational and translingual encounters, in this article, I will adopt the term "transnational communicative competences" to discuss strategies and competences utilized by speakers/writers in transnational and translingual communicative encounters—verbal or written—to successfully negotiate meaning across nations and languages.

Transnational communicative competences are becoming keys for increasing employability in the global workplace. Vertovec pinpoints the path to success in the super diverse reality through communication: "those who successfully negotiate, making choices among their various cultural and linguistic belongings, achieve mobility" (80). Therefore, transnational communicative competences help gain a lucrative career and a desired lifestyle. As college professors, we strive to educate our students beyond a subject or academic literacy, for life, rights, and effective citizenship "with the pursuit of long-term economic and social well-being" (Warriner, 102). With this being said, understanding transnational communicative competences and their developments is crucial for college educators, especially English instructors, who have a privilege of seeing transnational and translingual interactions unfold in their diverse composition classrooms when peers read, discuss, and negotiate meaning in writing.

Current college classrooms are unarguably diverse and present vast opportunities to explore and develop transnational communicative competences so important for college graduates today. In his recent book titled "National Healing", Professor Claude Hurlbert proposes composition classrooms as platforms where the rhetorics of the world engage, the study of meaning, experience, and creation takes place (Hurlbert, 19). He continues by warning English educators of the West to "start to learn beyond our comfort zones", "to start to learn about the world" (19). Hurlbert believes composition classrooms have a unique potential in developing the world-focused mindset in opposition to the "homegrown purity" mindset towards language and communication, which will allow students to unlock the negotiation of

meaning across languages and contexts and see the "meaning of the variety and wakefulness, of options and decisions, the meaning of being human in our equal searches for the meaning of our lives" (19). When referring to the goals and outcomes of meaning negotiation, Hurlbert recognizes that in addition to linguistic, cultural, and rhetorical trajectories of transnational communicative competences, there is also a socio-political trajectory. He implicitly defines the success of transnational and translingual encounters beyond mere information transfer. In Hurlbert's interpretation, such encounters are successful when the outcome is a constructive dialogue and a peaceful world. Multilingual writing scholars and applied linguists are in alignment with the above viewpoint. Canagarajah (2015), Kaur (2009), Pennycook (20017) and others warn against information transfer as the only targeted outcome of a transnational and translingual communicative act. Moving beyond pragmatics and conversation analysis, applied linguists focus on the ability of interlocutors to negotiate beyond conversational turns to broader social and ecological dimension (Canagarajah, 2013, 107). Hence, teaching towards transnational communicative competences means teaching beyond a linguistic clarity or information transfer towards open-mindedness, understanding and appreciation of variety and difference.

The Trajectories of Transnational Communicative Competences

Transnational communicative competencies are not a construct and is, therefore, not easy to assemble into a teachable and researchable model. They are more a process in and by themselves. Molina discusses a communicative competence formation model applied in an ESL classroom (2013). She adopts the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) definition of communicative competence or competences as "those which empower a person to act using specifically linguistic means" (Council of Europe, 2001). The council breaks communicative competence into the following components: linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic. Such a breakdown brings into a traditional linguistic definition the complexities of contexts of communication (sociolinguistic component) and the interlocutors' abilities to navigate discourses and rhetorics in various interactions (pragmatic component). At first sight, this seems to be a sound modal. However, Molina points out that the taxonomy of communicative competence developed by the Council is detached from the realities of human communication and does not illustrate "how competences separated and classified below interact in complex ways in the development of each unique human personality" (67). Canagarajah takes the complexity into account and formulates a notion of a performative competence as "dynamic and reciprocal strategies translinguals adopt to respond strategically to interlocutors and spaces with diverse norms in contact zones" (174). He argues for a situatedness of any meaning-making and poses to avoid constructs when discussing communicative competence and talk

of it more in the sense of "trajectories". As such, the notion transforms into a process and an experience unfolded at a specific moment in time and cannot be taught as a mathematical formula.

Cumulatively, I argue that transnational communicative competences is a more sound lens to adopt when exploring transnational encounters and teaching towards successful communicative acts across borders and languages. Such lens accounts for linguistic, rhetorical, and cultural components of communicating transnationally and translingually and, as a result, approaches global communication more realistically than purely linguistic (accuracy-based linguistic competence) or purely cultural (inter-cultural and cross-cultural competence) models. In addition, this model moves away from a singular notion of "competence" to the plural, "competences": multiple, varied, contextual, and practice-based. It deems important to veer away from decontextualized constructs and emphasize the continuous process of competences development through practice. Finally, when we target the development of transnational communicative competences in classroom settings, we teach students to not only accurately convey information, but to constructively negotiate meaning to achieve desired outcomes with respect to national cultures and rhetorics and, thus, to maintain and promote peace in the world. While we cannot teach transnational communicative competences per say, we can offer our students opportunities to practice communicating (orally and in writing) across languages and borders and, as a result, develop an array of strategies and competences along the following three trajectories of transnational and translingual communication: linguistic, cultural, and rhetorical.

Linguistic Trajectory Reimagined

When assembling transnational teams to undertake a company project, human resource specialists focus on the participants' English proficiency. Fagerstrom and Andersson point out that the failure of such teams as well as the roadblocks towards their success stem from the employees' limited English proficiency which manifests itself in errors in task descriptions when communicating with team members orally, confusing email messages, heavy accents, and so on (Fagerström & Andersson). Measurable linguistic proficiency in four skills (grammar, writing, reading, and speaking) is up to this day a key focus of EFL/ESL/EAP instruction and major international testing giants (TOEFL, IELTS) that grant access to jobs and educational opportunities worldwide. Limited English proficiency- not knowing enough vocabulary, weak sense of sentence structure, grammatical errors, accent, etc.- disturbs the minds of not only employers with international presence, but also their employees. As users of English often coming from expanding circle countries, we fear that our "non-native" linguistic abilities in English will hinder performance on the job. Going back to my job interview, I clearly did not have enough vocabulary to handle the translation task. Neither did I have contextual knowledge to properly

decipher the content of the email I was asked to translate. I may have used inappropriate sentence structure to explain myself as well. Nevertheless, I stepped into the process of meaning making and meaning negotiation to achieve the communicative outcome desired by both myself and my interlocutor. Donahue explains that in transnational context how we choose to encounter other and different is "vital to how we can make progress in the world" (149). Thus, what contributes to our success in transnational encounters is our stance on "the other", our attitude to difference. Are we able to build off of the linguistic resources that we have? Can we capitalize on "errors" we make? Can "errors" aid meaning making?

Canagarajah points out that "paradoxically", those engaged in transnational encounters contract space "for acceptance of differences, not a sharedness", and, as a result, negotiate actively (2013). Moreover, the scholar poses that lexical and idiomatic differences can help achieve intelligibility. One of the students engaged in a conversation with eight more peers from different countries in Canagarajah's study kept using non-shared idioms, such as "at the bottom of the budget", in his monologues. I noticed a number of Chinese students in my freshmen composition classes did the same when composing and sharing narratives with their peers. Particularly, I remember the metaphor of a "note sheet" that attracted attention of my domestic students in the narrative of their peer from China. Such non-shared idioms in both cases motivated peers/interlocutors to probe for meaning with more enthusiasm during a conversation. As a result of such probed negotiation, both parties achieved more than just information transfer, they gained knowledge by capitalizing on their linguistic differences.

Canagarajah poses that in the context of language diversity "meaning doesn't arise from a common grammatical system or norm, but through negotiation practices in local situations" (7). Often times, as research shows, deviations from norms do not inhibit the outcomes of communication. Such a position is crucial to adopt when interacting transnationally. In his book on translingual practice, Canagarajah presents an analysis of a large group discussion in the English contact zone that occurred among students of various linguistic backgrounds. The analysis shows that regardless of deviations from the norms of Standard English (grammatical errors, flawed sentence structure, use of non-shared idioms, and interference of various accents) the students were able to negotiate meaning successfully and achieve desirable result- discuss and assign roles in a team project. Donahue conducted a comparative study of French and American students' writing in English. She analyzed their essays as they were transitioning into college. She poses that once she worked passed linguistic issues in the essays of the French students, she found that both groups of students negotiated, appropriated, resisted, and adapted their way into college writing using quite similar rhetorical moves (Donahue 147).

Both Donahue and the students, participants in Canagarjah's study, chose to adopt an open-minded attitude to difference and the other. They all chose to focus on the outcome of written and oral interactions and higher-level choices and strategies that were employed by interlocutors in transnational encounters and contexts to achieve their rhetorical objectives and communicative goals. By doing so, they re-imagined linguistic proficiency as ability to look beyond one system and draw from multiple systems (grammatical, lexical, phonetic, etc.) to achieve communicative success (assigning roles on a team project and better understand how students in two different countries transition from high school to college writing).

To sum up, while measurable linguistic proficiency in four skills and the focus on correctness and "native-like" still occupy the minds of employers and English educators, those of us working in contact zones and laboring with language are re-defining error and difference. Errors are becoming resources that offer learning opportunities for everyone engaged in a transnational encounter and difference leads to a more active and engaged negotiation of meaning. Additionally, to the disappointment of many of us, a certain score on TOEFL or IELTS deemed appropriate by designers of testing solutions and the educational industry may not necessarily help users of English achieve desirable communicative outcomes. Similarly, having "native-like" proficiency or being a "native speaker" is not enough to succeed in transnational encounters. As communicators we make choices, pull resources, and behave appropriate to a specific context and communicative task. Transnational encounters demand from us to have knowledge beyond one language and one culture. They demand that we can engage various linguistic, rhetorical, and cultural repertoires into a constructive dialogue. Putting practice into educational context, English educators and composition instructors need to offer students opportunities to explore their various linguistic resources and practice negotiating meaning with the focus on communicative success, unique to each specific encounter.

Cultural Trajectory

Similar to the linguistic trajectory of transnational communicative competences, the cultural trajectory directs us to regard difference at a qualitatively new level. Communication with regards to various national cultures may inadvertently create and reinforce stereotypes. Such stereotypes occur not only on the interpersonal level, but also at the institutional level and often hinder learning outcomes. For instance, research shows that students who come from Japan are stereotyped at the U.S. colleges. Nakane and Ellwood (2009), in their comparative study of silence as non- participation among Asian students, find that western educators link the students' academic success with active participation in class (Ellwood & Nakane). Such participation, according to the western educators, is expressed orally during in-class discussions. At the same time, Japanese students, as observed by their western instructors, tend to remain silent in class. While being

silent, in the minds of some western instructors leads to failure or poor performance, Japanese students view talk in the classroom settings as "timewasting", "lacking consideration for other students", a "face-threatening act for the teacher", or a "face-threatening act for themselves" (Ellwood & Nakane). Thus, "silence" has become a marker of students' of Japanese ethnicity in the western educational contexts, which is faulty, stereotypical, and not supported by empirical evidence (Anderson; McVeigh; Miller). Reflecting on the above study, culture is often viewed as a static set of values and behaviors representative of a nation at a geographical level ("all Japanese are silent in class"). Furthermore, a foreign national culture is often regarded as different and, as a result, non-transferable and not acceptable in the western educational settings- as demonstrated in the study by Ellwood and Nakane. Such a perspective on what constitutes the notion "culture" leads to the creation and reinforcement of stereotypes. How should we perceive "culture" through the lens of transnational communicative competences? How should we respond to "national culture" and "national cultural differences" in transnational and translingual encounters?

I pose that in understanding "culture", we need to embrace the complexity of this multilayered concept. Researchers pose that there are at least six levels of culture: individual, team, functional, organizational, identity group, and national (TMC). When we look at culture from a perspective of plurality, stereotypes become harder to create. The plurality lens dictates that every single one of us is a mix of multiple cultures which are interconnected and interdependent. The national culture that we carry (Japanese, American, Russian) is the one formed historically in the context of the countries we are from. It is what mostly tends to be separative in diverse environments when we classify those coming from abroad as "the other". As a result, how we approach negotiating meaning across national cultures often decides the communicative outcome of an encounter. National culture is embedded in the national rhetoric; it is, hence, important to explore its roots, developments, and current values and problems. While national culture with its shared history, traditions and even certain values seems to be a more tangible layer of the "culture at large", it is a living organism that changes overtime to adapt to the demands and goals of the society today. It incorporates national traditions, national languages, and is only one part of who we are. Hofstede points out, "knowledge sharing, communication, and learning in organizations are profoundly influenced by [national] cultural values of individual employees" (2001). A number of companies working across various national cultures consider it crucial to provide their employees on transnational teams with cultural training aimed at understanding key business and social values, traditions, and rhetorical moves of each national culture involved in the project (Bennett et al.). Bennett et al. present that sixty percent of all companies with international presence headquartered in the U.S. provide their employees with cross-cultural training focused on the awareness of national cultures (239). Hence, in

transnational and translingual communication, it is important to understand what national culture interlocutors belong to, how they associate themselves with it, and in what ways it may impact communicative outcomes. Discovering and discussing national culture and understanding similarities and differences among values key to communication in various national cultures often leads to successful meaning negotiation. Additionally, such an awareness on the part of all involved in communication is vital. Going back to my definition of a successful transnational communicative act, it is not only knowledge or information transfer that it aims at, but also a stepwise construction of a sympathetic, caring, aware, and a peaceful global environment. Canagarajah cites studies where successful transnational sales team negotiations were preceded by a whole-team conversation about important historical, social-cultural peculiarities, and rhetorical choices assigned to sales negotiation discourse in the two national cultures involved in the encounter (2013). Such reciprocal constructive discussions of differences and similarities that occur prior or in the beginning of a transnational encounter are crucial in creating a safe and productive space to communicate transnationally. Discussing cultural and rhetorical differences is important in the educational contexts where multilingual students negotiate meaning orally and in writing. For instance, during peer readings of narratives, students in my multilingual freshmen composition classes take time to discuss rhetorical moves pertinent to their national cultures as well as various aspects of national and other cultures that emerge in their texts. Discussions of non-shared metaphors, naming practices in specific national cultures, such rhetorical moves as humor, prayer, framing paragraphs with rhetorical questions, code-meshing, cultural symbols, etc. are referred to by students as "best moments of the semester"; they add depth and uniqueness to students' writing, help students ask questions related to rhetoric and meaning and develop strategies for communicative success. Most importantly, such discussions demonstrate that the national aspect is only one layer of "culture at large". Canagarajah warns against a homogeneous orientation to cultures and ethnicities as well as classifying those as "different" and "conflicting" with western academic communities (2002). It may seem that attention to the peculiarities of the national cultures of interlocutors dominates in transnational and translingual professional and academic contexts. Such attention is important but it should not downplay the multilayered nature of "culture at large". All levels of culture play a role in meaning making processes of individuals. National culture can be looked at as a starting point for the discussion of a common ground before the communicative act takes place. Assumptions, stereotypes, values, and traditions critical for each particular communicative en- counter in each context need to be discussed for it to be truly successful. Interlocutors should make attempts at framing interactions with such discussions before engaging in high-stakes negotiations and projects. Coming into interactions with assumptions not discussed among interlocutors may lead to the strengthening of stereotypes and failure to

communicate meaning at in a truly effective manner. Transnational encounters should help representatives of various cultures, national and others, learn to develop the open and inquisitive mind towards culture and rhetoric. To properly handle cultural differences, the lens of multiplicity needs to be adopted when looking at a multifaceted culture of each individual involved in an interaction. Pedagogically, students need to be provided with opportunities to discover and discuss their various cultures, negotiate differences, develop strategies to make meaning and sustain constructive dialogue.

Rhetorical Trajectory

Claude Hurlbert points out that in order to re-focus our teaching on variety and develop a more intellectually satisfying educational model, we need to study the rhetorics of the world. Currently, there are very few studies that discuss world rhetorics with the goal of bringing those to college classrooms. Contrastive rhetoric scholars attempted to conduct and disseminate work on communicative behaviors and rhetorical patterns of natives of various national cultures. How- ever, Contrastive Rhetoricians are heavily criticized by a number of Composition and Multilingual Writing scholars for their homogeneous orientation to culture, focus on conflict between the students' national cultures and western academic discourse community, and, finally, limitations in research methodology. However, as everything else, the field has evolved and brought forth new considerations for transnational communications research. The New Contrastive Rhetoric today is "an interdisciplinary area of applied linguistics incorporating theoretical perspectives from both linguistics and rhetoric" (Connor, 494). It expanded its methodology and qualitatively changed its view of literacy. The field has gone beyond a para- graph as unit of analysis to better explore how and why we communicate. It is an important start- ing point to understand how national rhetorics have historically been shaped and continue to shape reflecting societal realia. A number of scholars in Business Communications take the work of New Rhetoricians seriously when researching transnational encounters. There are studies discussing cultural thought patters, rhetorical values, and foundations of various world rhetorics with the goal of helping international companies improve communication quality. Thus Ardchivili et.al. argue that national communicative traditions and cultural values of individual employees significantly impact successful knowledge transfer within international companies (94). Ardhcivili and his colleagues from four different countries conducted research to examine the effect of national rhetorics and cultures on knowledge sharing behaviors of Russian, Chinese, and Brazilian employees based on the universal criteria in international comparisons of cultures (Hofstede). They found that there are indeed differences as well as similarities in the values, principles, and patterns of national rhetorics in virtual communications among the population of the three countries. For instance, Russians valued communication by email and preferred this indirect interaction to the face-to-face encounters similar to Chinese, but in contrast

to Brazilians. Additionally, in-group mentality and "us" versus "them" strongly dominated virtual interactions within the Russian office. However, it changed when Russians communicated globally and refereed to their organization with a sense of loyalty and pride using the "us" pronoun. Such patterns and values could be explained from the perspective of a national culture and national rhetoric, looking at it historically or chronologically. Russian rhetoric stemmed from oratory speeches of Orthodox priests aimed at the implementation of Christianity. Values of the Russian national rhetoric historically have been: call for kindness, expressivity and emotionality, respect for the written word, and humility. With the time, Russian rhetoric developed into a tool to bring up patriotism: the love for the Tsar, country, and the Russian language. Interestingly, in the current day and age, Russians come back to their rhetorical foundations when bringing Rhetorica, the study of Rhetoric, into the grade school curriculum with similar purposes. As it is explained on the website of the Russian Ministry of Education, rhetoric is a key subject of the newly designed "Curriculum 2020". It is planned to be taught in grades one through eleven with the goal of "the realization and internalization by students of the following system of values: life of a person, the values of a family, patriotism, solidarity, kindness, and truth" (Ладыженская). Thus, historically, Russian rhetoric has been influenced by such national ideas as love of the land, the rulers, and the language. Coming back to the research findings of Ardchivili et al., Russians built messages that clearly defined inner and outer circles and exemplified the love and pride of the employees for their company.

As Donahue argues, translingual model of communication is a "rhetorical model important to the work of composition broadly speaking" (149). Russian rhetoric and its conceptualization contributes to the position taken by Kaplan and others: rhetoric reflects certain cultural values at a given time in a given society. Therefore, it is necessary to be aware of histories, cultural values, and thought patterns represented in the various rhetorics of the world in order to engage in meaning making across nations at a qualitatively different level. Canagarajah posed, "what enables translinguals to achieve meaning despite the fact that they all start with their own codes is their openness to negotiate on equal terms" and ability "to connect learning with use in their interactions" (p.176). Canagarajah sums up the above in his notion "cooperative disposition". Cooperation, I believe, can be achieved in translingual interactions when all sides are aware of how they may be different and the same when constructing communicative messages. In the end of the day, transnational communicative competences target outcome beyond efficiency; it directs us towards a genuine cooperation, orientation to and understanding of variety: its formation, history, and current societal values and concerns negated through rhetoric. While cultural training is provided by sixty percent of American companies with international presence, American colleges need to be the frontrunners in such instruction. The International curriculum initiatives that

currently predominantly offer costly study abroad opportunities or foreign language instruction (Thorne) should be complemented by various, classroom based and virtual, transnational and translingual initiatives aimed at allowing all students to participate in translingual encounters and develop key competences and strategies to successfully negotiate meaning in today's complex and demanding, culturally and rhetorically, communicative reality.

Transnational Communicative Competences: a Pedagogical Response

According to the NAFSA poll conducted in 2010, "international education is vitally important to the success of today's young people in navigating a competitive international land- scape, thriving in the global workplace, and leveraging their talents and skills in ways that move the United States forward in an increasingly connected world" (4). Unfortunately, the public sees foreign languages and study abroad programs to be often the only components of international education promoted in the American colleges. There are multiple opportunities of teaching about the world and for the global workforce in college classrooms. As a composition instructor, I use texts composed by freshmen in my multilingual and domestic composition classes as platforms for making and negotiating meaning across languages, cultures, and borders.

Pennycook explains, "Not only does translingualism allow us to unlock the texts with a text but it also opens up the complex processes by which individuals use the texts to reflect their often contradictory and conflicting subtextual personal, social and historical ideas" (Dovchin, Sultana, Pennycook 2015). This argument establishes a composition class, where various texts are constructed, shared, and discussed by a diverse group of students, as a space where transnational communicative competences get scaffolded. Writers work with texts that are, at their core, personal and contain histories, values, and norms of their respective cultures. These texts both unlock and shape who we are as communicators especially when we are offered to negotiate those texts with diverse audiences.

In order to unlock transnational and translingual perspectives towards communication and literacy in my multilingual freshmen composition classes, I designed a practice- and feedback- based Peer Reading and Response assignment conducted in the process of composing students' personal narratives. As part of the Personal Narrative assignment, students are asked to write a five to ten-page story focused around a memorable event in their lives and the question, "What are you burning to ask the world?" The students are encouraged to set their narratives up around their countries and places of birth and context-specific social, political, and other issues that may have a transformative impact on the class community. Topics for such narratives include but are not limited to female genital mutilation in Mali, rebel movements in Libya and seemingly peaceful little towns in the Middle East, over-diagnosis of mental illness in the U.S.; intellectual freedom, digital privacy, poverty, media wars in specific contexts, etc. The more diverse the class is, the more

interesting and challenging the topics are. I argue that the process of composing personal narratives at its peer reading and response stage allows students to develop competences to communicate strategically along the three trajectories: linguistic, cultural, and rhetorical, and helps them shape their transnational and translingual communicative competencies in unique ways.

Peer reading and response is an integral component of the composing process in all of my composition classes, domestic and multilingual. The assignment is designed to help students focus on the making of meaning in a text versus corrections for the sake of grammar and form; as such it promotes curiosity, community, and "cooperative disposition" when discussing stories, language, culture, and realities in which students of various backgrounds live and write. Peer readings of students' narratives encourage creativity in negotiating meaning and experimenting with language and rhetorical and literary means of constructing effective messages for multiple varied audiences. In the first week of the semester each student is scheduled to read one page from their personal narrative to the class and receive peer feedback. Students sign up to read their pages picking the day that suits their plans and pace. A three to five-week period is allocated to peer reading and response process within one academic semester. No more than three students get scheduled to read their pages on the same day. Readings and discussions take the whole class period, are guided by the instructor and followed by whole-class discussion session. The physical layout of the class is changed for the readings. The desks, initially arranged in straight rows to resemble a traditional classroom, are moved to the back; the chairs come up front, and get put in a circle. Readings have strict rules. The authors are to provide the instructor and all peers with a copy of their narrative page a class before they are scheduled to read. Peers are instructed to leave a minimum of five text-specific comments on the narrative page: two starting with the words "I like", two meaning-focused improvement suggestions (How would it change your meaning if...?), and a brief letter at the bottom of the page with a general, non-text specific comment related to the whole text, addressing the author by name, and accompanied with a signature. The Letter may contain anything the reader would like to say to the author as a result of the reading experience. Typically, those "Letters to the Author" contain words of encouragement, praise, and understanding. A handout is provided to all students in support of the Peer Response Assignment. Emphasis is made on reading peers' texts as if they were a piece of literature or any other types of texts that students read, discuss, question, and praise on a day-to-day basis. When reading peer's drafts, students were encouraged to markup spots that were interesting, fascinating, different, unique, and, as a result, successful; they were also prompted to circle words, sentences, phrases, fragments and portions of texts, textual and non-textual elements, etc. that were not clear, or hindered intended meaning as readers perceived it. In their comments, the students were encouraged to stay as specific to the text as possible and explain in

detail what and why they found successful or unsuccessful in peers' narratives. Grammatical and mechanical errors were explained to be the prerogative of the instructor and writing center tutors. Students were asked to not focus on the above in their comments unless the meaning is profoundly negatively impacted by mechanical issues present in the narratives. In the latter case, the students were required to explain in what way the meaning was affected by the error and provide a concrete improvement recommendation.

Negotiation of meaning across languages, cultures, and rhetorics in the course of Peer Readings begins on a peer response page in the form of peer comments. When commenting on the writing of one another, students focus not only on how language works to construct meaning, but also how rhetoric adds to the ability of a text to touch the reader. It can be argued that peer comments are not a part of the negotiation process due to the absence of an interlocutor. However, it is necessary to point out that the comments launch the negotiation process which continues when the comments are read, reviewed, and incorporated into the paper fully or partially, or ignored. It further continues when the comments are discussed in class during the peer reading process and beyond. All of the participants of the negotiation process make choices as to how they approach meaning making. Notably, each student receives comments from all of the peers and may synthesize receptive outcomes of their texts, become aware of multiple perspectives as to how the text is received and could be renegotiated for a shared meaning situated in the context of a particular class.

Peer response does not teach students formulas to become successful at communicating various ideas to various audiences, it teaches them to recognize, appreciate, and navigate diverse communication styles, patterns and practices as well as diverse backgrounds and histories of peers/audience effectively in order to make meaning. The Peer Readings and Response Assignment, when focused on meaning negotiation and not correction, guides students along the three communicative trajectories in the following ways. Within the linguistic trajectory, it teaches them to focus on meaning and not form, leveraging traditional "errors" as opportunities for meaning-making, which is very important in transnational interactions. Additionally, peer readings encourage students to problem-solve utilizing non-verbal resources when engaging in post-reading discussions. Peer readings promote open-mindedness to the students' national traditions and realia and, within the communicative trajectory, teach them to acknowledge that authors belong to various cultures personally and professionally.

Students' comments and Personal Narratives often focus on composing to increase awareness of their national cultures and the cultures of peers by means of writing. As a result of peer readings, students recognize that texts and non-textual elements involved in negotiation of meaning need properly framed for transnational communication. Framing includes gaining and sharing the knowledge of cultures and

rhetorics involved in a composing process at an appropriate level of detail. Finally, this assignment allows students to peek into the rhetorics of the world and see how various messages are constructed in the texts of their peers, how units of texts work together to reinforce, persuade, entertain, etc. It allows them to recognize rhetorical devices and appeals new to them, understand, and, often, appropriate new rhetorical patterns and choices to vary their own repertoires. As a result, Peer Readings and Response Assignment teaches students a variety of communicative strategies and helps develop their various transnational and translingual competences along the linguistic, cultural, and rhetorical trajectories.

Peer Readings and Response Assignment focused on negotiating meaning translingually and transnationally can be applied not only in multilingual composition classes or ESL sections of freshmen composition courses. With college classrooms getting more and more diverse, and with our understanding of literacy and culture expanding, such an assignment may be conducted with success in any English course at a college level. With the prior class discussion focused on multiple dimensions of culture, multilingualism as not necessarily related to foreign languages but encompassing dialects, professional jargon, etc. and, finally, rhetoric as specific to a locality, the above assignments can be offered to domestic student audiences with the same success in order to help them develop their competences and repertoires to communicate successfully with vast audiences across languages and geographies. Furthermore, in domestic educational contexts, it is recommended, using the virtual space of blogs and other interactive New Media, to partner with students in writing and language courses in a different country to compose, read, and respond to Personal Narratives.

Such an exposure will allow for the domestic student population to truly experience the challenges of transnational encounters and discover ways and means, including those afforded by the interactive New Media, to negotiate and make meaning across languages and national cultures. Regardless of the backgrounds of the students we teach, we need to be mindful of the current professional landscape of today's global world with its demands and complexities. In such an environment, educators and administrators at four year colleges must pursue practice-based curricula that incorporate assignments to imitate the communicative challenges of the professional world as well as involve plenty of instructor and peer feedback to help shape the students' transnational communicative competences and acquire transferrable skills and practices along linguistic, cultural, and rhetorical dimensions of transnational and translingual encounters. Such curricula focus will ultimately benefit not only the students, educators, and institutions of higher education by improving employability, access to resources, expanding horizons, and ensuing development through global partnerships, but also the global world in making it more peaceful and productive.

Peer response does not teach students formulas to become successful at communicating various ideas to various audiences, it teaches them to recognize, appreciate, and navigate diverse communication styles, patterns and practices as well as diverse backgrounds and histories of peers/audience effectively in order to make meaning.

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Artifact in Action · Peer Readings

Maria Houston

Overview

This assignment is grounded in the idea that the meaning of a piece of writing comes prior to its form. In other words, instead of focusing peer feedback on writing mechanics and other issues that pertain to the "nuts and bolts" of writing, we will direct our thoughts and feedback to the meaning of what we write first. We will focus on reading and not reviewing the work of one another. This is not to say that the form will be ignored. Meaning can be lost and/or obscured by the imperfections of form. Moreover, grammar and writing mechanics represent you and your academic and other identities. Therefore, the form cannot be neglected.

General Instructions

During peer readings you will be invited to read a page of your story in front of the class. You will know the date of the reading- we sign up for readings in advance. **Please bring enough copies of your page a class prior to the date of your actual reading.** You will distribute those copies to your peers and myself. You will receive pages with peer feedback back. It is expected that you will look through them at home and revise your writing incorporating some of the feedback provided by peers. Each page with feedback will be graded. You will receive a maximum of 40 points for pages with your feedback as a result of the readings.

What feedback is to expect?

You are to leave four comments on the margins of the one-page single-spaced paper. Your comments need to be specific. Circle the spot in the text that you choose to comment on. Your first two comments should start with the words *"I like",* the other two – "*How would it change your meaning if "or "What if".*

On the back or at the bottom of the page you should leave a paragraph long comment- a short letter/note for the author. You can comment on your general impressions of the text, your connection with it, and your wishes to the writer. Begin the letter with the name of the author. Sign your name at the bottom.

How to come up with feedback?

Start by reflecting on the following questions:

Think of how you read a book, article, a twitter post or anything else that draws your attention. How do you read outside of class? What thoughts come to your head

when you read FB or twitter posts? How do you engage with those texts? What is the nature of your inner monologue inspired by those texts?

What can you say about those Twitter posts? What do you like? How are they composed? Do they make sense? Do you have further questions? Finish the sentences below:

I like the way you…

I like how you…

I like the…

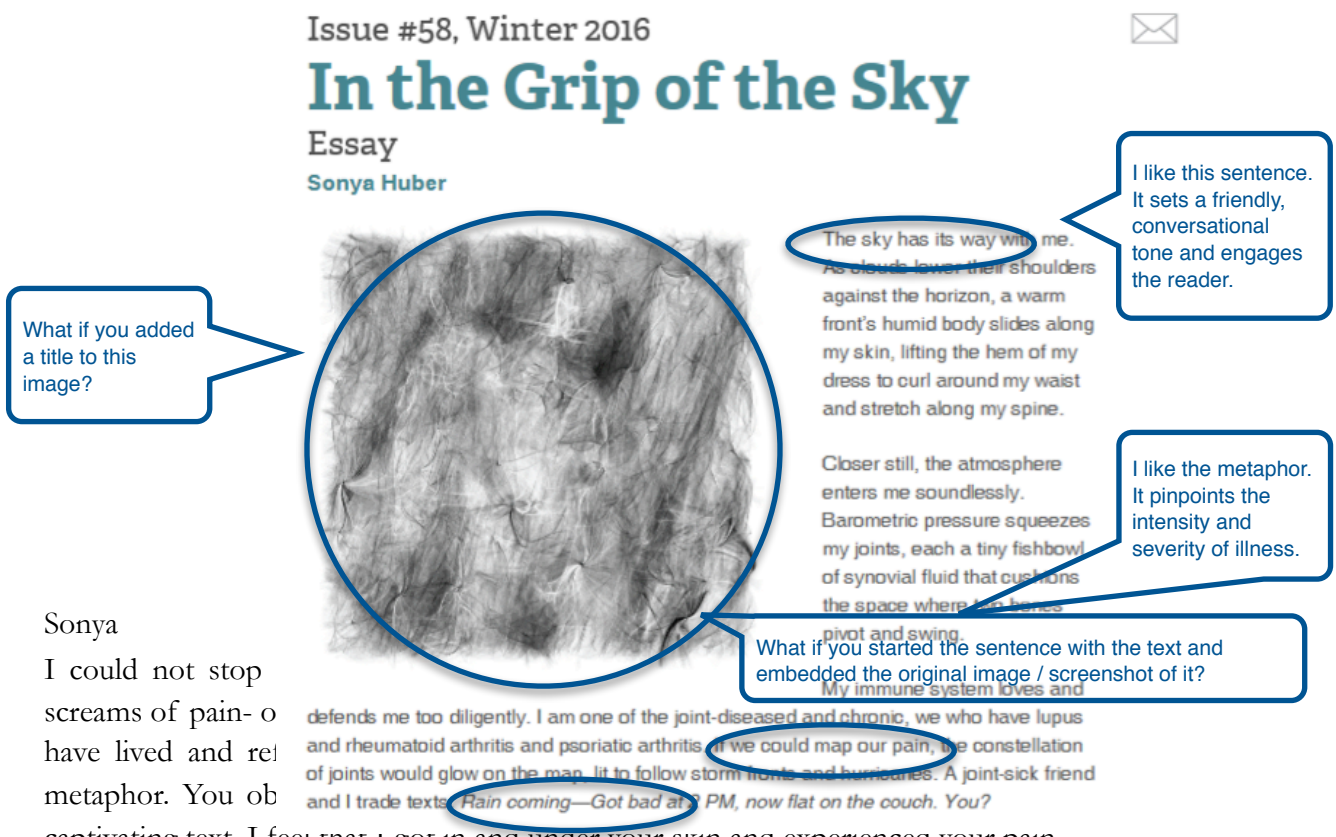
HWICYM/What if you started by…

What if you included…

What if you changed…

What if you added…

A Page with Feedback: Example



Sonya

I could not stop screams of pain- o have lived and re metaphor. You ob captivating text. I feel that I got in and under your skin and experienced your pain.

Jim